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CHARACTER OF BEDOUIN WOMEN

The Bedouin women are renowned for their acuteness. They comprehend quickly but use much caution in expressing themselves, as the following story will illustrate:

A young Bedouin was riding on his mare to a neighboring camp. Being thirsty, he halted in a small camp through which he was passing, before a tent where he saw only two women. One was old, the mother, as he thought; the other much younger, her daughter, perhaps. The younger one stepped out from the tent, and the rider addressed her thus:

"If we knew the name, we should salute; *low 'arefna al-isem sallemna*." Her answer was:

"If we knew the name, we should return the salute. When dost thou grasp thy saber? *kaṣabt sejfak*."

The rider understood the meaning of her words and, because he expected to grasp his saber in a revolt or bloody quarrel known as *fetna*, he addressed her by this name and indicated his own by pointing to the beauty of her face, *ḥasan*.

"Be strong, Fetna! What manner of face hast thou? *ḳaw fetna naẓar waǧheč*."

Without a moment's hesitation the girl replied: "I welcome thee, Ḥasan!"

The rider asked for water. She filled a small wooden trough, *žedaḥ*, and held it to him so that he could drink more easily. As he was sitting in the saddle, she had to raise her hands, the wide sleeves of her shirt slipped down to the arm pits and her arms were bare, revealing to the rider the hair under them. With a sigh he said:

"What a pity! If only the nether hair were as long as the upper! *jâ ḥejf en čân wâṭih miṭl 'âlih*."

To indicate that she understood, the girl replied: "It is still without a master, *min ṭillet wâlih*."

Glad of conversing with a virgin and liking the looks of her, the rider asked:

"Will you receive a guest gladly? *'endakom laẓ-ẓejf ekrâm*."

"Certainly, if he is destined to eat of our food; *elja čân leh naṣib baṭ-ṭa'âm*."

He then jumped off his mare; as the girl was leading it aside she stooped down in order to tether the animal to some object. Noticing near the tent a heavy spare peg of the kind used for securing the tent ropes and also a few smaller

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163 639 pegs for fastening the back tent wall, she took the heavy peg in her right hand, one of the smaller ones in the left, and tried to drive it into the ground in order to tether the mare. But the ground, being scorched and hard, the peg could not be driven in. She therefore complained to her mother, but in a careful way so as not to offend against decency. Hence she preferred to say wood, *ḫašab*, instead of peg, *wadd*:

"Mama, I hammer wood with wood, but the ground will not let in the wood. Hand me a big stone to hammer the wood with. *Jâ jumma-dukk al-ḫašab bel-ḫašab w-al-ḳâʿ mâ taḳbal al-ḫašab jâ jumma hâti li rṣuma adukk al-ḫašab.*"

The youth marveled at the girl's good sense as at the orderliness which he found in the tent. He called again when her brother returned from a raid, and made the girl his wife.

A Bedouin once had three wives. The first, whom he had married in his youth, bore him several children; the second he had taken to wife two years before; and the third, a blooming girl, had been in his tent scarcely two months. Once he went to an itinerant merchant for a short rug, *ḳaṭîfe*, and brought it home. The women began to quarrel as to which of them the rug was bought for. "It belongs to me," said the first one, "to me the mother of his sons." "I devote myself to him day and night. The *ḳaṭîfe* was meant for me," said the second. "He has already tired of both of you," exclaimed the third, "you ought to know that what is old cannot be made new again and an enemy will never become an intimate friend, *al-ʿatîž mâ jirǧaʿ ǧedîd wa-l-ʿadw mâ jirǧaʿ ṣiddîž*. I am young, still new to him; therefore I taste the best to him. He bought the *ḳaṭîfe* for me." The man listened but held his tongue, while the wives went before a judge to decide between them. The judge decided that the *ḳaṭîfe* belonged to the third woman.